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**CHARLOTTE REGION ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

**The Process of Creating a Successful Scalable Venture**

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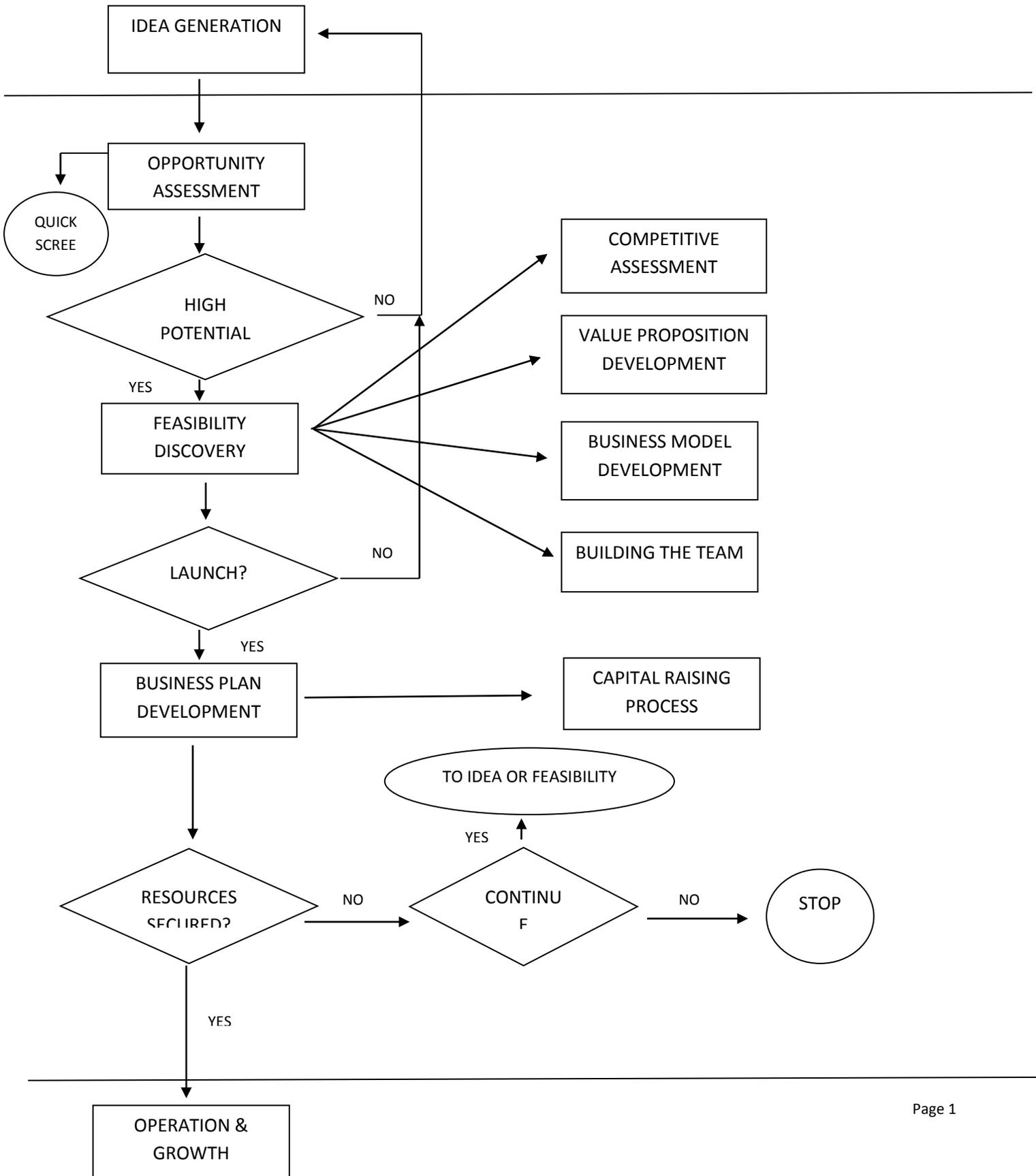
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# CHARLOTTE HIGH GROWTH ENTREPRENEUR PROCESS



## **Entrepreneurship in Charlotte, NC**

This document has been created to assist potential entrepreneurs in the Charlotte region. The goal is to provide a process of assessment and a model for growth so that entrepreneurs have a framework for the path from idea to opportunity to venture. Information has been compiled from multiple sources, both scholarly and mainstream press, such that the steps below are not the opinions of an individual but rather the collective view of the entrepreneurship field. Typically, experts agree that there are four stages that an entrepreneur launching a new venture must go through; these are Opportunity Assessment, Feasibility Discovery, Development of Business Plan, and Future Planning for Opportunity and Growth.<sup>i</sup> Each of these stages is considered in depth below. It is important to note, though, that the same issues and often the same questions are repeated throughout the sections. The topics that entrepreneurs must consider at Opportunity Assessment, Feasibility Discovery, and Business Plan Development are all extremely similar, if not the same. It is the level of depth that the entrepreneur contemplates and scrutinizes these issues that differs. As the entrepreneur proceeds, the level of detail and degree of understanding for each point in question must increase. Thus, while one might sense redundancy in the questions, the depth of the answers in different phases should never be the same.

### **Opportunity Assessment**

Many people have ideas about new products or services that they feel should be created. Very few people are able to transform an idea to a business opportunity. Idea generation and opportunity recognition are two cognitively different processes. Idea generation is necessary to creating a venture but it is not sufficient. Ideas may be good or bad, useful or not useful. Ideas that are both new and useful are considered to be creative. Creative ideas (new and useful ideas) that also can serve as the basis for a profitable venture are part of Opportunity Recognition. Opportunities are those that are new, useful and have the potential to generate economic value.<sup>ii</sup> The acknowledgement that Idea Generation and Opportunity Recognition are different stages in the creation of a venture is crucial to entrepreneurial success. Dr. Sankaran Venkataraman of the Darden School of Business at University of Virginia has said that, "Opportunities rarely fall into an entrepreneur's lap; they must be discovered or created."<sup>iii</sup> Dr. Venkataraman suggests that in our quickly changing world, many people have ideas: ideas about a new device, ideas about a social change, ideas about an unsolved problem or inefficiency. However, opportunities are typically based on creation – when someone brings an idea for a product, a market deficiency or a social force or trend together – as the formation of an opportunity takes a great deal of creativity and effort.<sup>iv</sup> However, this document is meant to provide a process for entrepreneurs starting at the assessment of opportunities. Idea generation is an important part of entrepreneurship, but it is outside the scope of this process document.

How do you assess whether or not an idea is a potentially viable business opportunity? What makes one opportunity better than another? A tool of choice for assessing opportunities is Timmons and Spinnelli's (2008) *Quick Screen*. The Quick Screen takes potential entrepreneurs through a series of questions and

considerations, continuously looking to identify a fatal flaw in the opportunity if it exists. The quick screen includes assessment of issues involved in the:

- Industry and Market:
  - What are the customers' needs? Are the customers reachable? Can they be identified?
  - Is it a niche market?
  - What is the market structure? How many sellers are in the market? How much product differentiation exists?
  - What are the conditions of entry and exit?
  - What is the market size?
  - What is the market capacity? Is there an under supply of goods?
  - Is 20% (minimum) market share attainable?
  - What is the cost structure of the market?
- Economics:
  - What are the profits after tax expected?
  - How much time before the company expects to breakeven?
  - What are the capital requirements for the product in that specific market?
  - Is there a 5x or 10x expected internal rate of return for the entrepreneurs?
- Competitive Advantage:
  - Is the venture sustainable?
  - What is the degree of control of the suppliers? Of the competitors?
- Personal Factors:
  - What is the entrepreneur's passion?
  - What will the lead entrepreneur do?
  - What is the downside for the entrepreneur? Can the entrepreneur weather failure?
- Fatal Flaw:
  - Are there any fatal flaws?<sup>v</sup>

The Quick Screen tool is meant to be used as an initial assessment of the entrepreneur's potential venture. The questions above are meant to stimulate thought and point out potential fatal flaws in the opportunity. At this stage, the entrepreneur is not expected to, and shouldn't, have developed a business plan. Entrepreneurs must consider how viable and how good their opportunity is before spending time and energy doing a feasibility discovery and before deciding to launch. Ideally, entrepreneurs consider numerous opportunities that they have come up with and choose to pursue only the one with the highest potential. The quick screen tool is meant to be used as a method of identifying which opportunity has the highest potential for success.

**ENTREPRENEUR ACTION: Complete a Quick Screen exercise on his/her own. If there are questions about the tool or results, please contact a business advisor or the Ben Craig Center for assistance.**

The questions above allude to a number of different variables that play into the entrepreneur's venture. First, the individual characteristics of the entrepreneur matter. What motivates the person, what

knowledge and skills the person has, as well abilities the person has to evaluate others, all play a role in the starting of the venture. Second, group variables such as the type of interactions entrepreneurs have with partners and customers and the quality of the input that others contribute, deserve attention by the entrepreneur. Lastly, societal variables such as government policies, technological advances and economic conditions all affect the entrepreneur's opportunity and future growth.<sup>vi</sup>

**ENTREPRENEUR ACTION: Complete the "Warm Up and Maybe Shut Down" exercise.**

### **Feasibility Discovery**

After opportunity assessment occurs, the entrepreneurs must go through a phase of feasibility discovery. The entrepreneur must continue to consider topics such as the macro-environment and whether the entrepreneur is proposing to launch a product or a service.<sup>vii</sup> Entrepreneurs must also go through a

1. Competitive Assessment Process
2. Value Proposition Development Process
3. Process of Building the Team.

To start, Dr. Kathleen Allen, Professor of Clinical Entrepreneurship at University of Southern California's Business School, suggests analyzing the strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and threats of the venture's macro-environment. Aspects to be considered are the social and cultural factors, technological advances, economic trends, and the political and regulatory environment at that time.<sup>viii</sup> Questions that entrepreneurs should be able to answer pertaining to their Industry of interest are:

- Is the industry growing?
- Where are the opportunities?
- What is the status of any new technology?
- How much does the industry spend on research and development?
- Who are the major competitors?
- Are there young, successful firms in the industry?
- What does the future look like?
- Are there any threats to the industry?
- What are the typical margins in the industry?<sup>ix</sup>

\* While some of these questions were posed in the Opportunity Assessment stage, the entrepreneur should be able to answer them with greater depth and clarity.

Depending on whether the entrepreneur is planning to launch a product or service venture, the inherent risks and benefits associated with the venture will vary drastically. First, the nature of the product/process' development must be discussed. Clearly, the way that a product is developed is different than the way that a service is developed. Questions pertaining to this discussion topic include:

- What is the impact of technology on the product or service?
- Is there international competition?
- Are there fragmented markets?

Second, if the entrepreneurial venture includes product development, the product's lifecycle must be considered. An example of a detailed product lifecycle starts with Opportunity Recognition and goes to Concept Investigation and Feasibility Analysis, Design and Development of Platform, Prototype Building and Field Testing, Initial Market Tests, Product Market Introduction and Ramp-Up, and ends with the possibility of outsourcing.<sup>x</sup>

**In order to learn more about the difference between the entrepreneurial processes of starting a venture based on a product versus as service, please consult \_\_\_\_.**

Third, a discussion of the process of intellectual-property development must occur with the entrepreneur. An entrepreneur must have an understanding of whether the invention is patentable, what types of patents exist, as well as what trademarks and copyrights are.<sup>xi</sup> If a product is being launched, then there will be clear detours in the process of the development for warranty, technology and patent discussions and decisions, all of which will likely to occur if a service is being launched.

As mentioned, there are four distinct stages in the Feasibility Discovery phase. Each is outlined and detailed below:

**1. Competitive Assessment includes:**

**a. Competitive Advantage**

The entrepreneur must be able to identify which distinctive factors give his/her venture a favorable position in relation to competitors. It is important to consider whether or not the competitive advantage the entrepreneur proposes is sustainable; ideally, the competitive advantage can be maintained over a period of time measured in years. Sources of the entrepreneur's competitive advantage could be efficiency or low costs, product innovation, quality or reliability, customer responsiveness or manufacturing innovation.

**b. Barriers to Entry:**

The entrepreneur must consider questions like: Is there an economy of scale in the intended market? Are there cost advantages for being independent of scale? What types of product differentiation exist? Is there great government regulation?

**c. Competitors:**

Entrepreneurs should identify and profile competitors based on their business concept and target market. Who are the direct and indirect competitors? Where do they operate? Competitive profiles include information on the company's revenue and financial strength, product or service offering, and management expertise as well as the market's customers, sales channels, anticipated weaknesses, and

segments. Sources for this information are company's annual reports (if it's a public company), news stories, industry reports, company websites, and even Google if care is taken.

**d. Benchmarks:**

Entrepreneurs should select a few competitors to use as a benchmark. There should be a sound rationale as to why each benchmarking competitor was chosen. In addition, entrepreneurs should choose a few typical and exemplary customers as benchmarks for their customer base. (In the next stage, when the Business Plan is developed, profiles of both the competitor and customer benchmarks should be included).

**e. SWOT Analysis:**

Entrepreneurs should complete a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis of their proposed venture.

**SWOT Analysis**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<b>Organizational</b>	<b>Environmental</b>

Strengths and Weaknesses are internally based; they focus on the organization. Opportunities and Threats are externally based; they focus on the environment in which the organization will exist. An example of a Strength listed might be highly productive line workers, Low costs. An example of Threat listed might be inability to secure new sources of raw materials. SWOT Analysis is a standard and meaningful tool that can help the entrepreneur assess the probability and magnitude of Opportunities and Threats. The SWOT Analysis will further the Opportunity Assessment's search for fatal flaws as it provides a new frame of reference to look at the similar issues. In the end, the SWOT Analysis should match the entrepreneur's business plan in that opportunities are highlighted and threats are addressed with countermeasures.

**ENTREPRENEUR ACTION: Complete a SWOT Analysis for his/her venture and discuss with business advisor or the Ben Craig Center. It is critical that the SWOT analysis is viewed by someone with 'fresh eyes' in order to ensure that nothing has been missed.**

**2. Value Proposition:**

Entrepreneurs must be able to clearly identify and define what value their venture provides to customers. The first piece of the value proposition is to answer the question, "Why should a customer do business with the entrepreneur's new venture rather than the competitor?" The customer will

evaluate the value to him/herself based on the equation: Value = Customer Benefit – Cost. If the benefit to the customer is not greater than the cost (and implicitly, not greater than the benefit of the competitors' product or service), then the new venture will not be successful.

At its core, the value proposition is a marketing concept. The entrepreneur must be able to answer who the target market is, what the benefits of the new product/service are to that market, and what the price is of the product/service relative to the competitors. These questions will help to identify how valuable the entrepreneurs' proposed venture really is. It is important to note, though, that value can be offered to customers in a number of different ways. Examples of aspects that entrepreneurs should consider are related to the product, price, customer access to the good, service, and general experience of the customer.

- Product: performance, quality, features, brand, selection, search, ease of use, safety
- Price: fair, visible, consistent, reasonable
- Access: convenient, location, nearby, at-hand, easy to find
- Service: ordering, delivery, return, check-out
- Experience: emotional, respect, ambiance, fun, intimacy, relationships, community

**ENTREPRENEUR ACTION: Practice his/her elevator pitch and try-it-out on others. If an experienced business person grasps the business concept quickly, then that is a good indicator that the entrepreneur is able to explain the venture.**

### 3. Building a Team:

In terms of the founding team, the different roles and expertise of the other people that entrepreneurs work with are critical. 'Hiring smart' is a necessary step in the entrepreneurial process.<sup>xii</sup> An Entrepreneur's team may consist of Professional Advisors (Accountants, Bankers, Attorneys, Board of Directors), Consultants (Management, Training, Sales), Governmental Agencies, Manufacturing Support (Subcontractors, Design Engineers), Sales Support (Manufacturing Representatives, Distributors, Foreign Representatives), and Service Agencies or Buying Offices. Many experts agree that a team of people with the same skills is much less attractive than a team of people all with diverse skills. Each entrepreneurial venture will have different hiring needs; just as one venture might require a design engineer to be on staff, so too might another need to hire a sales consultant. No matter the make-up of the team, the individuals should all be compatible in the sense of high work ethic and drive, but heterogeneous in skill sets.<sup>xiii</sup>

In her book, Dr. Allen provides a benchmark for an effective team:

- The lead entrepreneur and the team share the same vision for the new venture.
- One or more members of the founding team have experience in the industry in which the venture is being launched.
- The team's expertise covers the key functional areas of the business: finance, marketing, and operations.<sup>xiv</sup>

Questions that entrepreneurs can either ask themselves or should be asked by others in order to assess their team-situation are:

- Have you identified the members of the founding team or at least the expertise needed to start the venture?
- Have you determined what expertise is missing from the management team and how you will supply it?
- Have you begun asking questions about potential professional advisers, such as an attorney or accountant?
- Have you determined whether you will need a board of directors, an advisory board or both?<sup>xv</sup>
  - The first choice for board of director or advisory board members should be people who have been on a similar board before. If this is not possible, thought, then people who have helped others start ventures, such as attorneys, industry consultants, accountants, are the next best. The bottom-line is that the people selected for the board of directors or board of advisors should be people who the entrepreneur will respect and whose counsel will be accepted.

### **Development of Business Plan**

In order to develop a business plan, the entrepreneur and his/his team must be able to articulate why their particular opportunity has great potential for success. One way to do this is to develop an elevator pitch or a mock-presentation such that if the entrepreneur were to give a presentation to an investor, he/she would be able to provide a persuasive case to the investor for why the business opportunity at hand is a 'go'. Questions that should be addressed and answered by the entrepreneur are:

- What need is being served?
- Can the founding team serve that need?
- Why is now the right time to launch this venture?
- What is this venture's competitive advantage?
- Can this venture make money?<sup>xvi</sup>
- What is the basic idea for the new product or service?
- Why is this new product useful or appealing – and to whom?
- How will the idea for a new venture be realized – what is the overall plan for producing the product, marketing it, for dealing with existing and future competition?
- Who are the entrepreneurs – do they have the required knowledge, experience, and skills to develop this idea and to run a new company?
- If the plan is designed to raise money, how much funding is needed, what type of financing is needed, how will it be used, and how much will both the entrepreneurs and other persons realize a return on their investments?<sup>xvii</sup>

According to a McKinsey Consultant, a compelling business must pass two tests:

- Test 1: The Narrative Test. Can a story be told which describes who your customers are, what they value, and how you will make money providing them value. Do you make something that satisfies an unmet need or do you sell something in an innovative way?
- Test 2: The Numbers Test: Does the business model's story and assumptions hold up when you put numbers to it?

When developing a business plan, entrepreneurs should keep these two tests in mind and continuously aim to strength their ability to pass each of these tests.

**ENTREPRENEUR ACTION: One way to complete a Narrative and Numbers test is to create a one-page, tri-fold hypothetical sales brochure for the venture. The brochure need not be elaborate, but basic information about the venture and key financial information should be displayed. To evaluate the venture brochure, which represents the entrepreneur's attempt at both Test 1 and Test 2, the entrepreneur(s) should ask for feedback and initial responses to the brochure. Business advisors, the Ben Craig Center, and Experienced Entrepreneurs are all recommended sources of feedback.**

Provided below is a Business Plan Outline with subject headings and prescriptive details pertaining to each topic. While each specific bullet point may not apply to every entrepreneur, each entrepreneur should be able to articulate the ins-and-outs of each subject heading for his/her venture.

- Executive Summary:
  - Include most important points from all sections of business plan
  - Keep summary short - 2-3 pages maximum or roughly 10% of the length of your plan
  - Make sure that the first sentence captures the reader's attention and the first paragraph presents the business concept in a compelling way
- Business Concept:
  - What is the business?
  - Who is the customer?
  - What is the value proposition or benefit (s) being delivered to the customer?
  - What is your differentiation strategy?
  - What is your business model?
- Founding or Management Team:
  - Qualifications of founding team
  - How critical tasks will be covered
  - Gap analysis or what's missing (professional advisors, board of directors, etc.)
- Industry/Market Analysis:
  - Industry analysis (demographics, major players, trends, etc.)
  - Target market analysis (demographics, customer grid or market segmentation, Customer Profile, etc.)
  - Competitor analysis and competitive advantages (competitive grid)
  - Distribution channels (alternatives and risks/benefits)
  - Entry strategy (initial market penetration, first customer)

- Product/Service Development Plan:
  - Detailed description and unique features of product/service
  - Technology assessment
  - Plan for prototyping and testing
  - Tasks and timeline to completion of products or services prototype
  - Acquisition of intellectual property
- Operations Plan:
  - Facilities
  - Business processes
  - Plan for outsourcing
  - Manufacturing and distribution
- Organization Plan:
  - Philosophy of management and company culture
  - Legal structure of the company (see more below)\*
  - Organizational chart
  - Duties and responsibilities
  - Competencies of people involved
- Marketing Plan:
  - Who: the target customer
  - Where is the focus?
  - The 4 P's:
    - Product/Service
    - Place/Distribution
    - Price/Terms of Sale
    - Promotion/Advertising/Sales Support
- Financial Plan:
  - Summary of key points and capital requirements
  - Risk factors and mediation
  - Break-even analysis and payback period
  - Narrative assumptions for financial statements
  - Full set of pro forma financial statements (cash flow, income, balance sheet) for three years
  - Plan for funding
- Growth Plan:
  - Strategy for growth
  - Resources required
  - Infrastructure changes
- Contingency Plan and Harvest Strategy:
  - Strategies for dealing with deviations from the plan
  - Strategies for harvesting the wealth created from the business
- Timeline to Launch:

- Graphic: Tasks that will need to be accomplished up to the date of launch of the business in order of their complete. Also includes milestones of first customer, multiple customer and multiple products.<sup>xviii</sup>

\* While determining the legal form of the venture is an extremely important decision for the entrepreneur, the different possibilities and advantages/disadvantages of each are outside of the scope of this document.

In summary, the key questions that a business plan must be able to answer are:

1. What is the current situation? (context of the venture)
2. What is the problem? (opportunity for the venture)
3. What is your solution?
4. Why is this better?
5. What is it worth in dollars?

**ENTREPRENEUR ACTION: At this stage, the business plan should be critically reviewed by outside, knowledgeable resources. The Ben Craig Center has a proven, structured business plan assessment tool; it is suggested that the entrepreneur(s) contact a business advisor or the Ben Craig Center at this time before continuing on into the fundraising and operational phases.**

### Raising Capital and Finding Start-Up Resources

In conjunction with the Business Plan Development stage, entrepreneurs must assess their capital and start-up resources situation. Do they need to raise more capital? Have they secured the resources they need to launch the venture? There are two different skills needed for this phase:

1. Understanding the Venture's Financial Activities: It is important for the entrepreneur or someone on the team to be able to identify what and how many resources will be needed for the venture. This may include cost analyses, cash flow projections, hiring people, etc.
2. Ability to Acquire Resources: It is also important for the entrepreneur or someone on the team to know where to go to find start-up resources. This may include pitching the venture to investors or taking out a small business loan from a bank.

These two skills are rarely found in the same person, but both are critical for successful launch and maintenance of a venture, especially as the second skill is dependent on the first.

In terms of raising capital, one popular practice is to find outside investors. Frederick Beste III, an experienced venture capitalist, suggests that there are a number of characteristics he seeks in entrepreneurs when deciding whether or not to invest. These characteristics might serve as a hypothetical checklist of what investors look for in entrepreneurs when assessing opportunities being presented.

- Sound knowledge of the marketplace based on market research
- Sound knowledge of the competition based on a competition matrix

- Sound knowledge of the financial dynamics of the proposed company
- True understanding of the importance of cash flow
- Internal loci of control such that the entrepreneur is personally invested in the venture
- Inner confidence including optimism based on reason
- A plan and the ability to execute plans
- A sense of reality and current economic conditions
- An ability to hire smart, talented employees
- History of working hard and having fun<sup>xix</sup>

Based on Beste's principles and the experience of other proven venture capitalists, a list of questions has been developed in order to help the entrepreneur assess his/her opportunity or for others to assess an entrepreneur's opportunity.

- What is your elevator pitch? (In other words if you had to tell someone about your company on a short elevator ride, what would you say?)
- What product or service is sold?
- Who is it sold to?
- How much does it cost (average sales price)?
- How big is the target market?
- What percentage of that market do you need to penetrate to reach \$30 million in sales?
- Who is your competition, both direct and indirect? ("We have no competition" is not a helpful answer!)
- What is your key differentiation from the competition?
- How long would this differentiation last?
- Do you have any customers now? How many?
- Do you have any revenue now? How much?
- Do you have any strategic alliances now? With whom?
- Is your technology complete? If not, when?

Entrepreneurs must understand how to gather resources, be able to explain how to find the right numbers to use in their cost equations, prepare pro-forma income statements, and forecast start-up cash needs.<sup>xx</sup> In describing 'Entrepreneurial Death Traps', Beste explains that having insufficient start-up capital is a common limiting factor in entrepreneur's success. He says, "Don't start a company if you cannot assuredly come up with more capital than you think you'll need. It's almost certain that you'll have to."<sup>xxi</sup>

Questions pertaining to entrepreneurs' start-up resources that should be asked are:

- What are the numbers you need for performing your financial analysis?
- Have you gathered sales forecast data through triangulation?
- Have you prepared a pro forma income statement?
- When you create a cash-flow statement from start-up, when is positive cash flow achieved?

- Have you performed a cash needs assessment to determine how much capital you will need to start the business?
- Is the venture financially feasible?<sup>xxii</sup>
- Have you considered how many personal resources you have to help fund the new venture?
- Have you investigated the sources of debt financing in the community?<sup>xxiii</sup>

### **Operation and Growth**

Once the entrepreneurs have developed a sound business plan and have received seed capital, the next step for entrepreneurs is to consider issues related to operation and growth. These issues, though, are outside of the scope of this document.

## Resources for Charlotte Entrepreneurs

Once you have had a chance to address each question and venture-related issue touched on above, the information below on Reference Material, Training, Networking and Incubation in Charlotte will be of help in move your business from an idea to a reality. Below is a list of trusted and valued resources that the Ben Craig Center has put together for entrepreneurs in the Charlotte area.

### Reference Material

1. New Venture Creation: Entrepreneurship for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century by Jeffrey A. Timmons and Stephen Spinelli. This book can be bought online or at most large bookstores. It outlines in-depth the different steps and processes mentioned throughout the document.
2. Gale Research's Encyclopedia of Associations. This Encyclopedia helps entrepreneurs to locate networking and training organizations as well as businesses that are in a similar industry.
3. Entrepreneur Magazine and Website ([www.entrepreneur.com](http://www.entrepreneur.com)). The website includes an "Ask the Entrepreneur" feature through which individuals can pose questions to a panel of entrepreneurs about product pricing, marketing, business plan, etc. Entrepreneur also provides a list of recommended readings (<http://www.entrepreneur.com/bookshelf/index.html>).
4. Kelly K. Spors of the Wall Street Journal wrote an article in February of 2009 about questions that each rising entrepreneur should ask him or herself before embarking on a new-business-journey. ( K.K. (Feb 23, 2009). "So, You Want To Be an Entrepreneur: First, answer these questions to see if you have what it takes," *Wall Street Journal* (Eastern Edition). New York, N.Y. p. R.1.)
5. Sankaran Venkataraman's article the Ten Principles of Entrepreneurial Creation; This article appeared in the Batten Briefings, volume 1, number 1, autumn 2002. The Batten Briefings is published quarterly by the Batten Institute at the Darden Graduate School of Business Administration. The first three principles are as follows: 1) Opportunities must be discovered or created. 2) New Ventures are necessarily a gamble. 3) A balance between analysis and action is necessary. To read the others and the principles' explanations, see *Appendix 1*.
6. First Principals Inc.(FPI): FPI is a full-service technology transfer company specializing in Valuation, Licensing, and Commercialization of Intellectual Property. FPI has developed a thorough and systematic model to appraise the viability and commercialization feasibility of technology-based businesses. The FPI model includes aspects like Competitive Analysis and Alliance Strategy. More information about FPI and its services is available at [www.firstprincipals.com](http://www.firstprincipals.com).
7. Gaebler Ventures supports the website [gaebler.com](http://www.gaebler.com), which provides online resources for Entrepreneurs ([http://www.gaebler.com/Gaebler\\_Entrepreneurs.htm](http://www.gaebler.com/Gaebler_Entrepreneurs.htm)). The website provides a list of topic based links of helpful resources for entrepreneurs ranging from 'Starting your Business' to 'Human Resources' to 'Accounting for Entrepreneurs' to 'Mission Statements'. James Garvin, an employee of Gaebler Ventures, wrote an article titled, "When to Become an Entrepreneur?" underlining the timing aspects of when to start a business (<http://www.gaebler.com/When-To-Become-An-Entrepreneur.htm> ).
8. Trade Publications . Entrepreneurs can become knowledgeable about the industry they'd like to enter through trade publication subscriptions. Tradepub (<http://www.tradepub.com>) provides visitors with the ability to search white papers that have been posted on the site as well as sign up for free trade publications and industry specific magazines.
9. The Wall Street Journal's Small Business Section. In order to stay up-to-date on current events in the Small Business world, entrepreneurs can read the Wall Street Journal's Small Business

Section. In addition, How-to-Guides per topic are available at <http://guides.wsj.com/small-business/>.

10. Charlotte's Business Journal. Entrepreneurs can learn not only about Charlotte business happenings at [www.charlotte.bizjournal.com/Charlotte](http://www.charlotte.bizjournal.com/Charlotte), but also about Charlotte's Small Business happenings at [http://charlotte.bizjournals.com/charlotte/small\\_business/](http://charlotte.bizjournals.com/charlotte/small_business/).

## **Training**

1. Masters in Business Administration (MBA) Programs in the Charlotte Region: Entrepreneurs interested in gaining academic training on finance, management, accounting, marketing and other aspects of businesses may consider attending an MBA program. In Charlotte, there are three well-known programs.
  - a. UNC Charlotte's Belk College of Business is located at UNC Charlotte's main campus in the University Area and the Uptown Business campus. The majority of classes are offered in the evening as ninety plus percent of the enrolled students attend school part-time and work full-time. The Belk College does not have an Entrepreneurship Program or Concentration, although it is associated with the Ben Craig Center, an Entrepreneurial Incubator in Charlotte, so opportunities for internships and student-to-business consulting exists. ([www.belkcollege.uncc.edu](http://www.belkcollege.uncc.edu)).
  - b. Wake Forest MBA Program in Charlotte is for working professionals. Students can attend on weeknights or on Saturdays depending on the program that they choose, but no full-time MBA program is offered at Wake Forest's South Park campus. Wake Forest MBA students, whether in Charlotte or on the main campus in Winston-Salem, have access to the Angell Center for Entrepreneurship and the Babcock Demon Incubator. Students can participate in entrepreneurship competitions, internships and clubs. ([www.business.wfu.edu](http://www.business.wfu.edu)).
  - c. The McColl School of Business at Queens College is located in the Dilworth Area of Charlotte. The McColl School of business offers both Professional and Executive MBAs. Professional MBA classes are held at night, while Executive MBA classes are held on alternating Fridays and Saturdays. Students at the McColl School have access to the Entrepreneurial Leadership Circle (ELC) a group of entrepreneurs who have embraced the McColl School by providing support and counsel to its leadership, students and faculty. The ELC holds quarterly business briefings as well as networking luncheons. ELC offers 8 or more fellowships a year to McColl School students who show an aptitude for entrepreneurship. ([www.mccoll.queens.edu](http://www.mccoll.queens.edu)).
2. Entrepreneurship Centers in Charlotte Region:
  - a. Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC), which has an Uptown and University Area campus, is the home to the Institute for Entrepreneurship. CPCC's Institute for Entrepreneurship offers services and resources to those starting or with existing small businesses in Charlotte. The Institute targets four groups: Resource Partners, Clients, Underwriters and Business Providers. CPCC's Institute for Entrepreneurship offers free Small Business Seminars at Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Libraries and on CPCC's campus. Some of the seminar names include: 'Start Your Business Now', 'Choosing Your Legal Structure', 'Business Plan Basics', 'From Corporate World to Entrepreneur: How to Make the Transition', etc. The Institute is a partner of the Small Business Center Network (SBCN), which is a network of small business centers throughout North Carolina. ([www.cce.cpcc.edu/e-institute](http://www.cce.cpcc.edu/e-institute)).
  - b. As mentioned above, Queen's Entrepreneurial Leadership Circle.

3. Local Banks: Small and large banks can provide entrepreneurs business loan and other financial advice. Banks are willing to engage in conversation as they see the entrepreneur as a potential customer. The banks in Charlotte that have typically provided the most Small Business Assistance Loans are:
  - a. Bank of America ([www.bankofamerica.com/small\\_business](http://www.bankofamerica.com/small_business))
  - b. Bank of Granite([www.bankofgranite.com](http://www.bankofgranite.com))
  - c. First Charter Trust ([www.chartertrust.com](http://www.chartertrust.com))
  - d. Wells Fargo ([www.wellsfargo.com/biz](http://www.wellsfargo.com/biz))

#### Networking:

1. SBTDC (Raleigh, NC). Counselors at SBTDC can help point entrepreneurs to vendors, suppliers and other contacts as well as offer management assistance and business services.
2. SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives). SCORE offices offer the same programs that SBDCs offer, but the person advising has been in the industry and has years of experience. Find professionals near you at [www.counseling.score.org](http://www.counseling.score.org). Example: John Wyman, Hillsborough, NC; John started his own entrepreneurial consulting business.
3. Entrepreneurial Centers (CPCC, Queens)
4. Specific Topics:
  - a. Legal:
    - i. CPCC Entrepreneurship Center has partnered with the Charlotte Law School to provide No Cost Legal Counseling for entrepreneurs.

#### Incubation:

1. The entrepreneur should get to know the Incubator and ensure it's a quality program. What is the track record of the incubator, what is its graduation policy and what are the qualifications of the manager and staff?
2. Questions for entrepreneur to ask him/herself about the incubator:
  - a. Does incubator offer services and contacts you need?
  - b. Do you meet the incubator's criteria?
  - c. Is the program's fee structure right for you?

[http://www.nbia.org/resource\\_library/tips\\_ent/index.php](http://www.nbia.org/resource_library/tips_ent/index.php)

3. Ben Craig Center: The Ben Craig Center is a program, a physical place, and an organization. We support the success of start-up and early-stage entrepreneurs. Although the Ben Craig Center is a place, its services are available to qualified businesses throughout the Charlotte region. Innovation-based entrepreneurs can engage with the Center as Client-tenants or as Affiliates. Ventures may be at the start-up stage or at the growth stage. Ben Craig Center services include:
  - a. Facility simplicity including administrative and telecomm services
  - b. Learning community programs featuring expert resources and Ben Craig Center entrepreneurs
  - c. Connections to fellow entrepreneurs and business resources
  - d. Business building assistance including business plan and marketing plan guidance, accounting and financial systems design, and financial strategy
  - e. Coaching through a structured business development process and through informal interaction
  - f. Mentoring relationships with business leaders

You can learn more about the Ben Craig Center at [www.bencraigcenter.com](http://www.bencraigcenter.com).

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<sup>i</sup> Allen, K.R. (2006). *Launching New Ventures: An Entrepreneurial Approach* (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston.

<sup>ii</sup> Baron, R.A., & Shane, S.A. (2005). *Entrepreneurship: A Process Perspective* (1<sup>st</sup> Ed.). Thomson South-Western: Australia, pg. 54.

<sup>iii</sup> Venkataraman, S. (2002). "Ten Principles of Entrepreneurial Creation". *Batten Briefings*, 1(1).

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Timmons, J.A., & Spinelli, S. (2008). *New Venture Creation: Entrepreneurship for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). McGraw-Hill Higher Education: New York.

<sup>vi</sup> Baron, R.A., & Shane, S.A. (2005), pg. 12.

<sup>vii</sup> Allen, K.R. (2006).

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid, pg. 97.

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid, pg. 99.

<sup>x</sup> Ibid, pg. 121.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid, pg. 123-124.

<sup>xii</sup> Beste III, R. (2002).

<sup>xiii</sup> Allen, K.R. (2006), pg. 139.

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid, pg. 141.

<sup>xv</sup> Ibid, pg. 155.

<sup>xvi</sup> Ibid, pg. 184.

<sup>xvii</sup> Baron, R.A., & Shane, S.A. (2005), pg. 167.

<sup>xviii</sup> Allen, K.R. (2006), pg. 188.

<sup>xix</sup> Beste III, R.J. (2002). "The Twelve (Almost) Sure-Fire Secrets to Entrepreneurial Success." Published by the Venture Capital Institute. Available at [www.bizstartsmilwaukee.com/.../THETwelveSurefiresecretstosuccessentrepreneurs.pdf](http://www.bizstartsmilwaukee.com/.../THETwelveSurefiresecretstosuccessentrepreneurs.pdf).

<sup>xx</sup> Ibid, pg. 157.

<sup>xxi</sup> Beste III, F.J. (2000). "Entrepreneurial Death Traps: How to Avoid the Classic Entrepreneurial Mistakes." Published by the Venture Capital Institute. Available at [http://www.yesatvale.org/files/lecture\\_06.pdf](http://www.yesatvale.org/files/lecture_06.pdf).

<sup>xxii</sup> Allen, K.R. (2006), pg. 175.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Ibid, pg. 329.